

Blade Celebrates 150th Birthday

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Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. Four years after the town was founded, the Civil War broke out in 1861. Many of the men living in the Fairbury area enlisted in the Union Army. Fairbury was so deserted during the war that part of Locust Street was converted to a wheat field.

The Civil War ended in April of 1865 when General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. The Chicago Tribune chronicled the creation of Fairbury's first newspaper in its August 1865 issue. The Tribune reported that a new Republican paper had been started at Fairbury in Livingston County by J. S. Harper, and it was named the Intelligencer. Unfortunately, this newspaper only lasted about one year.

In 1866, H. S. Decker started the Journal newspaper and then quickly sold it to I. P. McDowell. The paper was then sold to Otis Eastman in 1867.

Brothers Othello Jenks Dimmick and Laurence W. Dimmick started a new Fairbury newspaper called the Independent in 1871. Fairbury had two newspapers until 1873 when the Journal went out of business. This change left the Independent as the only newspaper.

Fairbury returned to having two newspapers in 1876 when Charles B. Holmes started the Blade. In that era, Fairbury was experiencing a town feud. The opposing factions were the West-Enders associated with John Marsh and the East-Enders aligned with Bruce Amsbury. The Independent newspaper associated itself with the East-Enders, and the Blade represented the West-Enders.

The city feud degenerated to the point where the two sides set fire to their opponent's business buildings. Fairbury had so many fires that insurance companies raised their annual premiums to five percent of the building's value compared to less than one percent rates today. As a result, few business owners could afford fire insurance.

In the wake of the feud and the promise of unification, J. S. Scibird of Bloomington bought out both The Blade and the Independent and merged them into a new journal, the Independent Blade, based on the principle that in unity, there is strength.

Scibird was a man of vigorous courage, with a workable knowledge of grammar, a fair vocabulary, and a crusading spirit. He immediately embarked upon a campaign to rid Fairbury of the moral menace of prostitution. By 1875, the city clerk had registered over 30 such houses of "ill repute." Scibird received support from the clergy and most of the

inhabitants of Fairbury for his crusade. Within three years, he had driven the businesses to move to more appreciative locations where there was no "hounding" newspaper.

Scibird was assisted by his son Edward, and they developed their paper into a readable journal which soon gained the respect and admiration of the Fairbury residents. In 1881, the senior Scibird died, and Ed continued the paper briefly until a buyer could be found. C. E. Carter purchased the paper and changed the name from the Independent Blade to the Blade.

Mr. Carter grew tired of being tied to his job and decided that the best way to run his paper was by hiring editors and controlling the Blade from a distance. Thus, began 13 years of mediocrity as the Blade saw a rapid procession of editors. Among them were A. I. Baker in 1887, T. E. DuBois in 1888, D. A. Fraley in 1892, and the combination of Shankland and Price in 1894. In 1896, the Blade finally found a dedicated man in the person of Newt Fulton.

During this unfortunate journalism period in Fairbury, when Carter owned the paper, a second paper, the Local Record, was established. Newt Fulton had been the foreman of the "Record" before buying into the Blade. Once Fulton starting running the Blade, the townspeople realigned behind the Blade to support it once again. After Fulton's switch, the "Record" slowly drifted into oblivion.

In 1899, J. Sutton was taken on as a partner at the Blade. In 1901, James Patterson took the lowest level job at the newspaper, the "printer's devil." His assignment was to clean the messy printing presses and perform other odd jobs. Starting at the bottom, Patterson worked his way up to buy Fulton's half of the newspaper when Fulton retired. Patterson worked 53 years at the Blade and became the editor and handled the Blade management, with Sutton remaining as his partner. When Sutton retired, Frank Phelps, Cora Evans, and L. L. Harris purchased his share of the paper. This proprietorship continued until the sale of the newspaper in 1954 to Donovan Kramer.

During Patterson's period of control, the paper attained a circulation of approximately 3,000 readers. This circulation level is excellent considering the population of Fairbury never exceeded 2,500 to 3,000 people in that era.

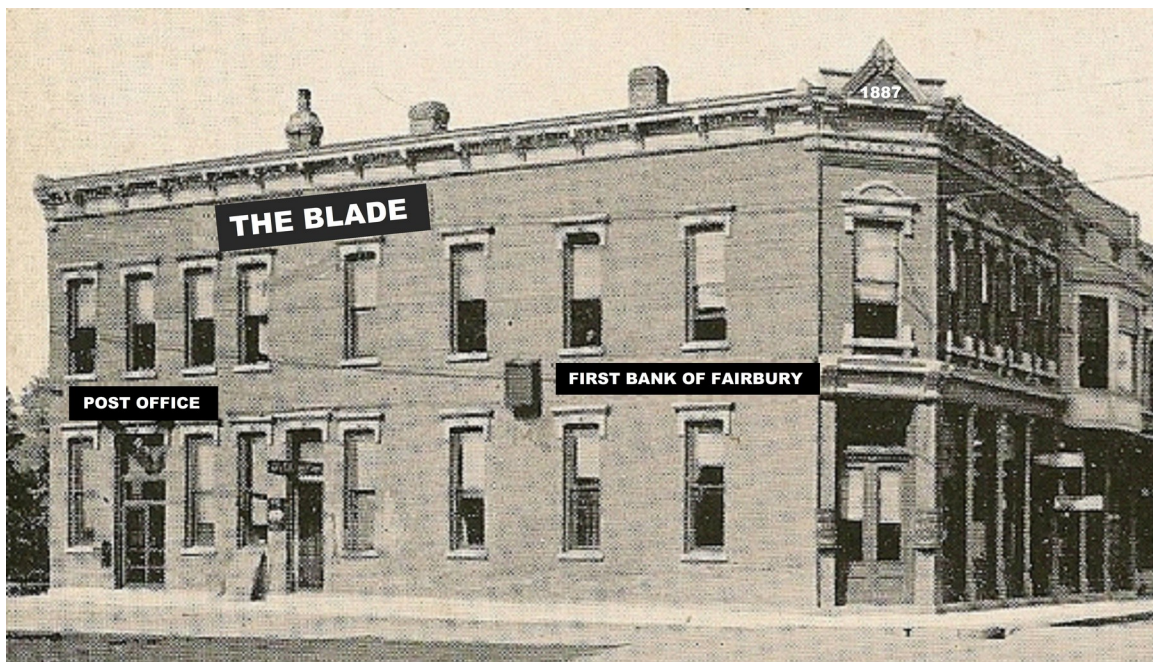
Under Don Kramer, the Blade continued its steady upward climb in quality until it reached the much-coveted rating of best weekly or semi-weekly in the State of Illinois. This honor, the Will Loomis Trophy, was awarded to The Blade in 1960 by the Illinois Press Association.

Kramer sold his paper in 1962 to James Roberts. Under the management of Jim Roberts, the journal won awards for 2nd best photography, 3rd best feature story, and an honorable mention for advertising excellence. 1963 brought four more prizes into the Blade's fold; 2nd best typography and makeup, honorable mention for advertising excellence, general excellence, and best original column.

Jim Roberts lived in Fairbury and was very active in the community. After 28 years of owning the Blade, Jim sold the Blade and retired in 1990. He died in 2006 at the age of 84.

Since 1990, the Blade has had many different owners. In 2019, the newspaper was owned by the GateHouse Media chain. That year, Gatehouse acquired the Gannett chain that publishes USA Today. The name of the merged firm is Gannett.

The Blade traces back 150 years to the Independent newspaper started by the Dimmick brothers back in 1871. The paper continues to document the history of the Fairbury area in the 21st Century.



The Blade, the Post Office, and the bank were located in the building at the southwest corner of Third and Locust Streets circa 1890

